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ABSTRACT

A study compared the topics addressed in a professional trade publication, the RTNDA (Radio and Television News Directors Association) "Communicator," with topics specifically addressing broadcast news in the scholarly journals "Journalism Quarterly" and "Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media." The purpose of the research was to help ascertain whether television and radio news directors will find the research and issues of academic journal researchers useful and relevant to their journalism responsibilities. Findings are based on a content analysis of the publications from 1992-1994, and are a partial replication of an earlier study that compared the content of "Quill," "Editor and Publisher," and "Columbia Journalism Review" with "Journalism Quarterly." As in the earlier study, through the use of correlation measurements of ranking association, the data suggest that the most frequent topics addressed in "Communicator" are also important to the scholarly journals. An even stronger correlation was discovered when a second ranking--without the category "theory and research methods"--was also tested. Despite evidence that broadcast news managers do not read nor value the published efforts of researchers, these findings suggest that studies involving the quality of journalism, ethics and professional values, competition with other media, and work environment issues, may find a receptive audience when the style of an article is revised and edited for interest to the practitioner in addition to the scholar. (Contains 27 references, 7 notes, and 2 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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Scholarly but Relevant: A Comparison of Topic Frequency Between *Journalism Quarterly, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* and RTNDA *Communicator*

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Abstract

This study compares the topics addressed in a professional trade publication, the RTNDA *Communicator*, with topics specifically addressing broadcast news in the scholarly journals *Journalism Quarterly* and *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. The purpose of the research was to help ascertain whether television and radio news directors will find the research and issues of academic journal researchers useful and relevant to their journalism responsibilities.

The findings are based on a content analysis of the publications from 1992-1994, and are a partial replication of an earlier study that compared the content of *Quill*, *Editor and Publisher* and *Columbia Journalism Review* with *JQ*. As in the earlier study, through the use of correlation measurements of ranking association, the data suggest that the most frequent topics addressed in *Communicator* are also important to the scholarly journals. An even stronger correlation was discovered when a second ranking--without the category "theory and research methods"--was was tested.

Despite evidence that broadcast news managers do not read nor value the published efforts of researchers, these findings suggest that studies involvign the quality of journalism, ethics and professional values, competition with other media, and work environment issues, may find a receptive audience when the style of an article is revised and edited for the practitioner in addition to the scholar.

Introduction

The founding editor of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* wrote of the day he presented a grant proposal to an executive at ABC to help launch the journal. When the editor, Robert Avery, explained to the executive, Alan Wurtzel, that the journal would include articles highly critical of all the television networks, Wurtzel smiled and said, "You don't really expect anything written in your journal to make any difference here. Don't worry about it" (Avery and Eadie, 1993, p. 175). While there is little research into reading practices of broadcast news directors, some studies suggest that academic journals are rarely perused. How germane is the work of communications scholars to mass media professionals? This study explores the journalistic relevancy potential of research topics investigated by academic journals to television news directors.

This paper begins with a short history of the philosophical battle for the journalism and communication programs in higher education and a literature review of the research of authorship and readership within the scholarly journal community. This is followed by an examination of topics addressed in specific publications. A content analysis of articles delimited to broadcast news topics from *Journalism Quarterly* and *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* are compared with articles from *Communicator*, the publication of the Radio and Television News Directors Association. Statistical tests explore correlation

between the topics addressed by two journals dedicated to research and one written for broadcast news professionals.

Background

In his history of communication study and research, Rogers (1994) marks the appointment of Ralph O. Nafziger to The University of Wisconsin's school of journalism in 1949 as a seminal point in the decades-long battle over the purpose and direction of journalism and mass communications education. The conflict arose between the "Green-Eyeshades," those educators who advocate for universities the primary responsibility of equipping the practitioner, and the "Chi-Squares," who, according to Rogers, "sought to provide the emerging field of communication study with an objective understanding of human information exchange, based on scientific research" (p. 460).

The debate grew heated through the years, with caustic articles in trade journals like *The Quill* offering soapboxes to proponents of both views. In the 1960s it appeared the Green-Eyeshades were fearful that the "communicologists, the methodologists, the sociologists, the academics" might become too influential in what was the then the Association for Education in Journalism (Highton, 1987).

By the 1980s the battle seemed to be over, as far as some were concerned, and the Chi-Squares had won. Lovell (1987) used *Journalism Quarterly* to elaborate on three reasons why professionals would find nothing of interest in its issues.

First, he claimed articles were murky in both style and content, focusing on minor points and expanding on them. In addition, instead of covering a topic of current interest to the profession, *JQ* "devotes an excess amount of space to topics of questionable relevance" (p. 23). Finally, Lovell charged that potentially interesting subjects were rendered unintelligible through unnecessary complication.

The editor of *JQ*, Guido Stemple, responded to each of the complaints in a subsequent issue of *The Quill* (1988), and urged those in journalism to work with those in academe to bring the two sides closer and support each other. Journalism and mass communication are not the only academic disciplines to hear harsh criticism of research and scholarly publication. Sykes (1988), whose book title Profscam embodied his view of most educators in higher education, quoted a respondent to a survey by the American Council of Learned Societies to make his point: "There are far too many journals, and most of what they publish is ignorant drivel" (p. 118). There is also the issue of applicability of research to policy making. Noam (1993) perceived that communications scholarship has no real world role. Even though communications studies have made significant contributions, Noam declared "when a discipline that is by now fairly substantial in terms of numbers and maturity is largely absent in the shaping of society's treatment of the very subject of its study, one must take note" (pp. 199-200). This raises two questions: Does the literature suggest that attempts at bridging theory and research

with the news business are doomed; and are there means to a successful link, at least as it relates to the subjects under consideration here, broadcast news and news directors?

Literature Review

Dary (1973) surveyed the membership of the radio-television division of the Association for Education in Journalism in the early 1970s. Of those responding to the questionnaire, almost all teachers in higher education had approximately seven years of news work experience, and the typical respondent considered teaching as the primary role and research and service to the profession to be secondary. Although in need of updating, this survey was conducted well into the Green-Eyeshades vs. Chi-Square debate. Schweitzer (1985a) has looked extensively into the research productivity of journalism and mass communication scholars. From his survey comparing academic journalism researchers to newspaper editors and other news practitioners, the author was surprised to find that the academics agreed with the practitioners that more practical, problem-oriented research studies were needed. Ranked second was a call for better, more clear writing.

That same year Schweitzer (1985b) wrote that journalism schools too often followed the industry, when they should be leading it. He emphasized

> Without in any sense denigrating the mission of educating undergraduate students, I contend that the secondary mission of providing service for professionals is what will ultimately determine

> the success of schools and departments of journalism (p. 38).

But in a subsequent study, Pease (1993) conceded that professional development by journalism educators still worked against them when promotion and tenure were concerned; it didn't count as much as juried conference papers and journal articles. Pease also found deep resentment among those for whom professional service was an important part of the mission.

Inquiries into research productivity in broadcasting and telecommunications in university programs rely on the conclusion (backed up by evidence) that scholarly productivity is an important measure of the school's quality. Publication in selected journals suggests greater weight by department heads when considering promotion, allocating funds and promoting the school to prospective graduate students (Vincent, 1984, and Vincent, 1991). Administrators of graduate programs, Schweitzer (1989) learned, did not agree that journalism faculty should be able to receive tenure and promotion without having to do scholarly research.

As the long-standing debate indicates, journalism and communication educators have a difficult time satisfying all sides. In a review of the research on journalism schools, Fedler (1993) countered criticism from professionals in the newspaper industry. He found evidence that three perspectives were mistaken: that students were being taught by Ph.D.'s who knew little about the practical work of publishing a newspaper, that students were not taking a sufficient number of courses in the

liberal arts, and that editors did not care whether their new employees had degrees in journalism or not.

Riffe, Hedgepeth and Ziesenis (1992) surveyed print journalists, press association heads and educators with the question "What do you think is the most important issue facing the field of journalism today?" and then content analyzed four trade publications, categorizing articles according to the survey findings. They were struck that the topic that concerned journalists the most, the "quality of journalism," was also the dominant topic addressed in *Journalism Quarterly*.

When Lovell (1987) listed his complaints against the chi-squares he was concerned about the lack of articles covering issues of interest to the profession. Yet when he listed the subjects covered in *JQ* from 1974-1983, the dominant category was Press and Society, not theory or research methodology.

On the other hand, an argument could be made that authors and educators could do more in addressing the concerns of journalists and news managers. Weaver and Wilhoit (1988) surveyed journalism and mass communication faculty and found that while 42.5 percent read *Journalism Quarterly*, only 3.1 percent read *RTNDA Communicator*, the publication of the Radio and Television News Directors Association. Almost a third of the respondents either read only academic journals or read neither industry nor research publications.[1]

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[1]Twenty-five percent of the respondents indicated that broadcast reporting/editing was their subject of instruction.

Part of the dilemma for educators engaging in research concerns the review process. Endres and Wearden (1990) found that reviewers for journalism and mass communication journals are a distinct, homogenous and separate group from others in higher education. Reviewers were more likely to have received the terminal degree from a university that emphasized publication, possess only about five years of professional experience, hold senior rank, and been reviewing between four to six articles a year for the past nine years.

Soley (1993) examined whether communication research was reaching an audience beyond readers of academic journals. Tracing the published works of the 53 most frequently published researchers (from an earlier study), he determined that these researchers were not writing articles that were distributed to the general public, nor were they writing articles for professionals. The audience was almost exclusively academicians.

Soley advocated a determined attempt to reach out to consumer and trade publications, assuming the research was important. Another study by Schweitzer (1989) insinuated that this was plausible. Surveying productive scholars for the reasons why they do research, he found that 97 percent felt that the single most important determinant was personal motivation. They wanted to do what they were doing, promotion and tenure concerns notwithstanding. But if researchers look to professional concerns and conduct applied research, would they have an audience?

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Since 1972, Stone has regularly conducted national surveys of broadcast news directors. In 1986, he noted that as news directors' responsibilities grew from the 1970s into the 1980s (particularly in television), their administrative and managerial duties increased from 22 percent in 1972 to 53 percent in 1985. A similar decline was indicated, from 39 percent to 12 percent, from those indicating less time was spent on news. Redmond's (1994) survey found that 83 percent of responding news directors would like to have more formal management training if they could afford the time. And Ellis (1992), when interviewing news directors, reported that they were more manager than journalist. One told her, "I would say probably more manager/leader... probably 60/40 and that's only because of market size. If I was in a bigger market it would probably be 90 percent."

There have been several studies surveying newspaper editors, news practitioners and reporters that have included a question about their reading habits. Stone (1987) surveyed broadcast news directors who are members of the RTNDA about their reading habits. Although this does not constitute a sampling of the entire population, Stone found that 53 percent of the television news directors and 70 percent of the radio news directors responding to the survey read the *Communicator* at least an hour or two each month. For news of the industry, over 70 percent indicated they read *Broadcasting and Cable*, and for articles concerning the field of journalism and mass communication, *Columbia Journalism Review* and *American Journalism Review* were

the most cited.[2] Stone has noted that since no more than 66 percent of all television newsrooms and only about ten percent of radio newsrooms are represented in RTNDA, the findings may not be generalizable (personal communication, June 19, 1995).

Weaver and Wilhoit's (1991) survey of American journalists asked respondents to identify the types of functions they performed; 48 percent of the 240 broadcast respondents indicated they had managerial or supervisory duties. When asked to identify reading frequency from a list of publications, *RTNDA Communicator* was not listed.[3] The authors did note that broadcasters were just as likely to read *Quill* and *Columbia Journalism Review* as print journalists. *Journal of Broadcasting* (now *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*) was read regularly (almost every issue) by only six percent; 11 percent answered "sometimes."

Much of the research explains who reads what, and why. What has not been sufficiently examined is the nature of topics included in journals and other publications. One exception is the study by Riffe, Hedgepeth and Ziesenis (1992).

Method

A content analysis was conducted of *Journalism Quarterly* and *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* from the years 1992-

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[2]At the time of the survey, two of the titles were *Broadcasting* and the *Washington Journalism Review*. For radio news directors *Radio & Records* was ranked higher than *American Journalism Review*.

[3]There was no space for a category "Other."

1995, involving all articles that dealt in a direct way with television news.[4] The results were compared with a sample of *Communicator* articles from 1992-1994. The topics determined from the survey by Riffe et al., in which respondents were asked, "What do you think is the most important issues facing the field of journalism today?" were used to categorize issues in this study. The topics that were compared and adapted from that study are listed in Table 1. Each article that was included in the table of contents was coded, except for book reviews, commentaries and articles or columns less than one page in length. The articles were coded by two researchers and checked for intercoder reliability. Agreement was found in 96 percent of the cases. In addition, intracoder reliability for the *Communicator* was checked by one of the researchers after a three month interval, achieving 82 percent agreement.

Reliability may be problematic, because a large number of *Communicator* articles could not be coded exclusively to one category. In addition, whereas a significant percentage of the journal articles was determined to have a theoretical base, there was always a secondary category that could be added. Where there was disagreement between the researchers, a primary topic was considered and accepted, or the article was rejected. This process eliminated five articles from the study. Because of the

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[4]Those articles with terms like broadcast news, television news, radio news, broadcast journalism and broadcast media news in the title or abstract were included.

Table 1

Topics in *CJR, E&P, Quill, JQ*	Topics in *Comm, JQ, JOBEM*
Survival of newspapers, loss of and/or non-readership, circulation	Survival of station/news, loss of audience, ratings and audience issues
benefits, pay, job security, compensation, health benefits, workman's compensation, unionization	benefits, pay, job security, compensation, health benefits, workman's compensation, unionization
credibility of paper	ethics, professional values, credibility
ethics, professional values	taxes-government intervention
taxes-states wanting to tax circulation and/or advertisements	national economy-recession, depression, etc.
national economy-recession, depression, etc.	competition for revenue and with new technologies and delivery systems, advertising, etc.
competition for revenue, ad lineage, competition with new technology and new delivery systems, etc.	journalistic quality-depth, objectivity, accuracy, completeness, adequacy of coverage
journalistic quality-depth, objectivity, accuracy, completeness, comprehensiveness, adequacy of coverage, appearance	working environment-conditions, workplace harmony, morale, impact of technology upon work environment, personnel shortages
working environment-condition, workplace harmony, morale, impact of technology upon, personnel shortages	education and training of journalists, continuing education, background and beliefs
education and training, continuing education, background and beliefs	changes in ownership and other issues concerning ownership
changes in ownership-chains, corporate, JOA, MBAs in newsroom	issues of access, legal constraints, libel, 1st amendment, privacy, etc.
recycling, environmental concerns, impact of newspaper on environment	cultural diversity, minority issues, gender issues
issues of access, legal constraints, libel, FOI, first amendment, privacy	research methods, theory
cultural diversity, minority issues, gender issues (coverage and staffing)	history and biography
international issues, reporters in foreign country, comparative studies	international issues, U.S. reporters in foreign countries
media Effects, diffusion, uses and gratifications, research methods	non-journalism issues, ads, PR, entertainment, etc. issues
history and biography	
non-journalistic, other issues, including ads, PR, entertainment	

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lack of mutual exclusivity among the categories taken from the Riffe, et al. study, other researchers may make different choices. Finally, the topic "credibility" was difficult to specify because the original coding scheme was somewhat vague in clarifying the category. Consequently, for this study it was collapsed into the "ethics and professional values" category. The final sample included 85 articles from *Communicator* and 53 from *JQ* and *JOBEM*.

Findings

Table 2 shows the results of the content analysis. As with the original study of the journalism publications *Columbia Journalism Review, Quill* and *Editor and Publisher*, the quality of journalism (along with work environment issues) was the most prevalent topic in *Communicator*. It was the second most dominant category found in the broadcast news articles of *JQ* and *JOBEM*. (Because of their similarity in nature and purpose, the two were merged into one variable: scholarly publications.) When the theory and research methods was omitted as a category,[5] "quality" became the dominant topic, far outnumbering the second most cited category, "ethics and professional values." Ethics-related articles also appeared frequently in the *Communicator* sample. Among the primary topics, only "work environment" was

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[5]In the Riffe et al. survey, the topics mentioned by journalists, press association heads and educators about the important issues facing the field of journalism did not include "theory and research methods."

Table 2

Comparison of Topics

Topics	*Comm* %	*JQ/JOBEM* %	*JQ** %
Quality of Journalism	20	25	21.5
Theory and Research	0	36.5	17.3
Ethics, credibility, values	17.6	11.5	6
Work environment issues	20	1.9	2.3
Competition	15.3	5.8	2.1
"Survival"	5.9	3.8	1.6
Diversity issues	4.7	5.8	4.4
Education and training	3.5	1.9	4.4
History/Biography	3.5	3.8	9.9
International	3.5	1.9	8.3
Non-journalism issues	2.4	0	11.5
Access issues, law	2.4	0	
Benefits, pay	1.2	0	0
Ownership	0	1.9	1.9
National economy	0	0	0
Recycling and environment	0	0	0
Taxes and government	0	0	.2
Total	**100**	**100**	
N of Cases	**85**	**53**	

*The percentages were taken from the Riffe et al. study, which analyzed all *JQ* articles from 1986-1990.

found at the top of one and the bottom of the other. The only other category of topics above ten percent in either publication was "competition for revenue, with new technologies and new delivery systems." Categories listed below this were too infrequent and clustered so as to limit definitive statements.

The quality of journalism, its depth, accuracy and adequacy of coverage, and issues of ethics, professional values and credibility represented 38 percent of the articles found in *Communicator* and 37 percent of *JQ/JOBEM* articles. Competition and the work environment were important but not consistent between the publications.

The topics were ranked based on frequency for both *Communicator* and *JQ/JOBEM*, and Spearman's rho, a measure of association between rankings, was computed. The result was similar to most of the pairwise rank correlations found by Riffe et al. (.52, p=.04).[6] Since there was no topic of "theory" or "research" mentioned in the original survey, and since there is evidence that most journal articles could be found to have an emphasis beyond theory and methodology, a second ranking was conducted without "theory/research" as a topic. The result of Spearman's rho measure of correlation yielded greater strength of association (.71, p=.003).[7]

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[6]It could be argued that, since there is not a fairly equal distribution of ranks, and a few cases have both extremely high and extremely low ranks, that Kendall's tau is a more appropriate measure. It yields a correlation coefficient of .49, p=.017.

[7]Kendall's tau: .60, p=.004.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although rankings only provide for measurement of ordinal data, and may screen certain elements of the data, the fact that the two types of publications emphasize comparable issues relevant to both professionals and researchers, such as the quality of journalism and professional values and ethics, suggests that gulf separating chi-squares and green-eyeshades may not be quite so wide, and more the result of such factors as writing style.

The focus of this study, broadcast news, limited the number of articles for consideration over the four year period, and resulted in a relatively small sample. In addition, budgetary constraints prevented an initial survey of broadcast news directors. Because of their accountability and service to both management and news, news directors almost certainly would have listed additional topics and deleted some from the index used in this study. Future research could also add other publications favored by broadcasters, such as *Broadcasting and Cable* and *Television/Radio Age*. Additional news personnel might elicit other discrete categories to questions concerning both issues and publications.

This study was an effort to replicate, at least partially, the Riffe et al. study, tailoring it to publications that discuss issues applicable to broadcast journalists and accounting for allusions to professional disdain for academic and scholarly

publications. This limited the content analysis to only those articles mentioning broadcast news in their title or abstract.

The primary conclusion drawn from this preliminary comparison is that while scholarly journals will continue with theory and research as their main thrusts, the authors of published research may also find a receptive audience among professional publication editors. Studies revolving around the quality of journalism, ethical and professional values, the work environment, and competition with other media, new technology and new delivery systems are topics relevant to readers of both types of publications. Many, though, would require a re-working of the text. Professional journalists, from reporters to news directors, have shown a disdain for academic and theory-driven jargon and may not be expected to adequately analyze and interpret complicated statistical findings.

There is no shortage of criticism and advice from within the academic ranks concerning the lack of academic journal readership among news professionals. Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communication gathered at a 1985 conference the perspectives of several researchers to help improve future directions in communication scholarship. The comments of many of the speakers echoed those described in this paper (Sharp, 1988). Some urged less reductionism, quantification and jargon (see, for example, John Stevens or Gerald Stone, in Sharp, 1988). Others advocated clear separation of the theoretical from the applied

(see, for example, Melvin DeFleur or Brian Winston, in Sharp, 1988).

The professional journalist may not be expected to spend time translating and adapting the findings of a study published in a journal dedicated to the pursuit of new knowledge. The journalist wants answers to existing, practical problems. Yet the rewards for a scholarly researcher lie not in the practical but in the theoretical -- the advancement of knowledge. Since there is little evidence of movement from institutions to bridge these goals, it falls to the researcher to take the initiative. It is incumbent upon the institution, though, to recognize the effort. The research topics discussed in this study are not only worth the consideration of practitioners, but are worth the effort of editing and re-writing for multiple audiences. Ultimately, such effort can contribute to bridging the gap.

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